

# Using HOLSAT to evaluate tourist satisfaction at destinations: The case of Australian holidaymakers in Vietnam

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## Abstract

The potential of Vietnam as a holiday destination for Australian travellers is examined using HOLSAT, a new model that compares the performance of positive and negative holiday attributes against a holidaymaker's expectations [Tribe, J., & Snaith, T. (1998). From SERVQUAL to HOLSAT: Holiday satisfaction in Varadero, Cuba. *Tourism Management*, 19, 25–34]. The attributes used are developed for each particular application and are not generic, overcoming some of the limitations of earlier models in dealing with the concept of holiday satisfaction. This paper seeks to review the value of HOLSAT as a means of identifying tourists' satisfaction with a holiday destination, in this case Vietnam. The findings indicate that the HOLSAT model is a valuable tool that can be used to evaluate the satisfaction of tourists with particular destinations. It proved to be easy to apply and a useful diagnostic tool that can be used in the future planning and management of the tourism industry in Vietnam, enabling wholesale and retail travel agents to improve levels of service and develop appropriate products to meet the expectations of the Australian travel market. © 2005 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

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## 1. Introduction

Australians have always been great travellers and appear to have a different perception of distance compared to travellers from other nations, possibly because of the size of their own country. They are constantly looking for new holiday destinations that give value for money and the opportunity to experience a wide range of activities and attractions, often with the added feature of encountering a new culture. Moreover, the changing ethnic composition of Australian society has expanded Australians' awareness of the diversity of Asian cultures, particularly those of South East Asia. The result is that over the last few years there has been a marked change in the preferences of Australian travel-

lers away from longer and more expensive travel to Europe towards shorter and cheaper trips to Asia. Vietnam is relatively easy to access from Australia, where the market has a high demand for new destinations and has a good knowledge of the country and its attractions (Millington, 2001). Over 93,292 Australian citizens travelled to Vietnam in 2004 (VNAT, 2004). Unlike the French, the majority of Australian tourists prefer to travel in pairs or in small groups. Most appear to be less affluent than the average American visitors. Their travel profile is broad ranging, particularly when compared with that of the French or American visitors (Biles, Lloyd, & Logan, 1999).

This paper specifically examines how Australian pleasure travellers perceive Vietnam as a holiday destination. It seeks to identify how closely various travel attributes sought by Australian travellers are actually matched in Vietnam. It does this by applying the HOLSAT model which measures the gap between

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Australian tourists' expectation and experience of various destination attributes to determine the level of satisfaction. This provides an opportunity to review the methodology behind this model as well as to assess its applicability to a destination that is different to that where it was first developed.

## 2. Tourist satisfaction

The HOLSAT model is essentially developed around the concept of satisfaction. Before looking in detail at the model it is appropriate to look briefly at the concept of satisfaction itself.

Although there are many definitions of satisfaction it is generally recognised as a post-purchase construct that is related to how much a consumer likes or dislikes a service or product after experiencing it (Woodside, Frey, & Daly, 1989). In terms of travel, Moutinho (1987) notes that this post-purchase construct is primarily a function of pre-travel expectations and travel experiences. Similarly, Pizam, Neumann, and Reichel (1978) define tourist satisfaction as the results of the comparison between "a tourist's experience at the destination visited and the expectations about the destination".

However, this perspective has been criticised for assuming that expectations play a pivotal role in determining satisfaction. For example, Arnould and Price (1993) suggest that the most satisfactory experiences may be those that are not expected. Others have shown that there are various ways that 'expectations' can be conceptualised: as 'ideal', 'desirable' or 'minimum tolerable' (Miller, 1977). Notwithstanding these concerns, research on tourism perception and motivation has demonstrated that expectations do play a role in the motivation to travel and in determining preferences for destinations. The attractiveness of a destination reflects the feelings, beliefs and opinions that an individual has about the destination's perceived ability to satisfy the special vacation needs of that person (Hu & Richie, 1993). The notion of destination attractiveness has been conceptualised by linking it with the decision-making process and with the specific objectives demanded by travellers (Mayo & Jarvis, 1981). Mayo (1973) demonstrated that the image of a destination region is a critical factor in the destination choice process. Attractions provide major symbols and images for the presentation of destinations to the public (Leiper, 1990). A set of natural or man-made attractions or "something interesting or unusual to see or to do" is typically demanded by tourists (Ferrario, 1979). Tourists therefore eventually choose their destination based on perceived images of the destination. These all form part of what we commonly think of as expectations. Given their role in motivation, it seems logical that they

would also affect the consumers' assessment of their experience.

In the light of this, the definition put forward by Cadotte, Woodruff, and Jenkins (1982), that satisfaction refers to the comparison of expectations with experiences in terms of performance, is reasonably well accepted and is particularly relevant when the focus is on destinations rather than individual service providers (see below). An individual's expectations are confirmed when a service performs as expected, negatively when the service performs worse than expected, and positively when the service performs better than expected (Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988).

There has been an enormous amount of research looking at the nature of satisfaction and its relationship to other constructs such as service quality. It is generally recognised that service quality impacts on satisfaction directly hence if service quality is improved, satisfaction will be improved (Soutar, 2001). However, recent research has suggested that service quality may be only one of the factors influencing satisfaction. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1994) claim that a customer's overall satisfaction may be related to their assessment of not only service quality (e.g. courtesy, responsiveness, etc.) but also product features (e.g. size of hotel room, etc.) and price. In a similar vein, Soutar (2001) suggests that satisfaction may be affected by both service quality and value. This may be particularly important in the case of tourism destinations where the costs of visitation are known to differ markedly. Any measure of satisfaction therefore needs to be able to take this into account.

Satisfaction is thus a multi-faceted concept and is even more complex when the focus is on a destination rather than an individual service provider. In the case of destinations, satisfaction is assessed by reference to the many individual aspects of the holiday encounter, including the services and facilities used. In this way, both a measure of overall satisfaction and a diagnostic evaluation of those aspects of the holiday responsible for satisfaction may be obtained. In summary, satisfaction has generally been found to be the outcome of the comparison between expectations and experiences, the difference between expectations and perceived performance, and the "fit" between tourist expectations and host destination attributes.

To measure the level of customers' satisfaction with specific services, previous researchers have used various instruments that generate gap scores based on the difference between the expectation and perception (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). Scholars such as Moutinho (1987), Nightingale (1986), Chon and Olsen (1991), Pizam, Jafari, and Milman (1991), Chadee and Mattsson (1996), Danaher and Arweiler (1996), Qu and Li (1997), Knutson, Stevens, and Patton (1995) and Kozak and Rimmington (2000) have applied this approach in the tourism sector by measuring satisfaction

with the delivery of individual services associated with a destination. However, their approach is not holistic in that it does not address the total holiday experience but concentrates on the services delivered by particular organisation(s). Measuring tourists' satisfaction with a particular destination is not simply the cumulative evaluation of service quality of a number of individual service providers. There are various activities and experiences that are key attributes of a specific destination that are not linked to specific organisations or are provided by several working in concert. Any measure of satisfaction must therefore include these aspects of the total holiday experience.

### 3. The HOLSAT model

HOLSAT is a relatively new model that attempts to address the complexity of measuring satisfaction with a destination. Tribe and Snaith (1998) developed the HOLSAT model and used it to evaluate holiday satisfaction at the popular resort area of Varadero, Cuba. HOLSAT is based on the disconfirmatory paradigm outlined above and is therefore in line with the general thrust of the literature. However, the developers of this approach claim that it overcomes some of the limitations of other models when satisfaction is measured for a destination rather than a specific service. These will be outlined below.

Tribe and Snaith (1998) defined tourists' satisfaction with a destination as the degree to which a tourist's assessment of the attributes of that destination exceeds his or her expectations for those attributes. HOLSAT differs from many models by measuring satisfaction as the relationship between performance and prior expectation rather than performance alone as is the case with SERVPERF (Cronin & Taylor, 1994), or performance relative to importance as in Importance-Performance Assessment (Martilla & James, 1997) or performance related to best quality (an absolute measure of what they think an *excellent* service would provide) as is the case with SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988).

A key feature of the HOLSAT instrument is its ability to measure a tourists' satisfaction with their holiday experience at a destination rather than a specific service provider (such as a hotel). As noted above, most studies of tourist satisfaction have focused on these individual services (cf. Ryan & Cliff, 1997; Suh et al., 1997). HOLSAT specifically addresses the variable and multi-dimensional character of consumer satisfaction with a destination by comparing the performance of a diverse range of holiday attributes of the destination against customer's expectations of the same. Moreover, it does *not* utilise a fixed menu of attributes, generic to all destinations. Instead, a suite of attributes is generated to

ensure that the most appropriate are being considered at the particular destination. Considerable effort is made to generate these from a number of sources associated with the particular destination. These include an analysis of promotional material, so-called 'critical' literature (guidebooks, newspaper reports, etc.), and interviews with those who have visited the destination. This addresses issues raised by Carman (1990) and Ryan (1999), who express concern that the fixed dimensions originally identified by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry are not necessarily applicable in other situations, especially those associated with destinations.

The fact that HOLSAT utilises destination attributes that are "site-specific" is important for it provides an opportunity for price-based reasons for selecting a holiday destination to come into play thereby taking into account measures of value. This is certainly the case for Vietnam, where the country is currently perceived as a holiday destination pitched at the budget-priced sector of the market. Travellers choosing to holiday in Vietnam may have different expectations to those vacationing on, e.g. a luxury cruise. Tribe and Snaith (1998) claim that HOLSAT is therefore capable of accommodating the role played by price in determining satisfaction and consumers duly take this element into account when assessing the holiday experience.

Both positive and negative attributes are used. Positive attributes are characteristics that convey favourable impressions about the destination, whereas negative attributes are those that do the opposite. Although holidaymakers visit a particular destination for hopefully a pleasant experience overall, there may be nevertheless negative features about the location that the vacationer is fully aware of *before* commencing the holiday (e.g. pollution, noisiness and crowding, etc.). Tribe and Snaith (1998) suggest that the inclusion of negative attributes—key characteristics that are not desirable in the view of the holidaymaker—is an additional important advantage of HOLSAT because, paradoxically, these also have the capability of contributing to holiday satisfaction. For example, holidaymakers may agree that 'customs clearance and baggage collection' will be tedious and time consuming at their destination and so will score their expectation of this attribute low. If in practice the opposite is experienced, then a level of satisfaction would be realised for this attribute, as the experience exceeded the expectation (Tribe & Snaith, 1998).

The model features a questionnaire wherein respondents are asked to rate the expectation of each holiday attribute (i.e. the holidaymaker's impression before travel) and to rate the experience or performance on the same set of attributes following the holiday experience (i.e. after travel). A Likert scale is used to score each attribute for both states. Mean scores for each attribute are determined for both "expectation"

and for “experience”. The difference between the mean “expectation” and “experience” scores for each attribute gives a quantitative measure of the level of satisfaction shown by the vacationers.

The results are presented graphically on a matrix whereby the score for “expectation” is plotted against “experience”. Attribute scores are shown relative to a 45° “Draw” line. “Win”, “Loss” and “Draw” scenarios for each holiday attribute are possible. “Win” represents those attributes where the consumers’ expectation is met or exceeded, “Loss” represents a situation where consumers’ expectations are not met and “Draw” suggests a close match of consumer expectations and experience. For negative attributes, the interpretation is the reverse (i.e. points plotted *above* the Draw line represent a “Win” for that attribute), since the “experience”, although negative was not as bad as initially thought by the holidaymaker. For each attribute, the further away from the “Draw” line data points are plotted, the greater or lesser the degree of satisfaction perceived by the holidaymaker. Where points lie directly on the Draw line, the holidaymaker’s “experience” exactly matches his or her “expectation”, and therefore satisfaction has also been achieved.

The research being reported here sought to utilise the HOLSAT model to measure the levels of satisfaction of Australian travellers when holidaying in Vietnam. It also attempted to improve on the HOLSAT model by including a series of open questions to gain richer information about the overall holiday experience, something that was lacking in the original study by [Tribe and Snaith \(1998\)](#). Essential socio-demographic characteristics of the sample population were also sought and possible relationships examined between these and levels of holiday satisfaction experienced. Only a limited amount of information is reported here.

#### 4. Applying the HOLSAT model in Vietnam

##### 4.1. Questionnaire design

The first step in designing the questionnaire was to establish holiday attributes or characteristics considered important to vacationers to Vietnam. As noted above, determining key attributes of the particular destination is where HOLSAT differs markedly from other instruments. This ensures that the issues and attributes being considered are the most appropriate in the context of the destination being studied rather than for some mythical or standard destination. Attributes for the focal destination were carefully chosen by a detailed review of information from a number of sources, including promotional and advertising literature drawn from the broader industry, travel literature and guide books, personal experience and critical reflection as well as

interviews with Australian travellers with previous experience of holidaying in Vietnam. This aspect of the model contrasts with SERVQUAL ([Parasuraman et al., 1988](#)), which employs 22 fixed attributes, irrespective of the specific application. The step of soliciting this information, including that identified by experienced travellers, is important as it avoids anticipating what could constitute ‘holiday satisfaction’ before the research commences.

The key attributes chosen were classified under the major headings of the classic “Five As” that constitute a holiday destination’s overall appeal, viz. “Attractions”, “Activities”, “Amenities”, “Accommodation” and “Accessibility”. While the classification system used to group the attributes was different to that used by the model’s developers ([Tribe & Snaith, 1998](#)), there were similarities with regard to the attributes themselves. [Tribe and Snaith \(1998\)](#) grouped their attributes into the following categories: physical resort and facilities; ambiance; restaurants, bars, shops and nightlife; transfers; heritage and culture; and accommodation. Besides the way that the attributes were classified, the primary difference reflected the fact that [Tribe and Snaith’s](#) focal destination was a resort and many of the attributes concerned the characteristics of the resort itself. In the current study, these concerned hotels in general. Furthermore, the number used in this study is considerably less than the number selected by [Tribe and Snaith \(1998\)](#) and reflects a deliberate decision to make the overall survey questionnaire somewhat simpler than that of the HOLSAT instrument’s creators. Thirty-three attributes composed of 25 positive and eight negative attributes were used (see [Table 1](#)).

An important characteristic of the HOLSAT instrument is its ability to consider positive as well as negative attributes when attempting to describe the key characteristics of a holiday destination. Thus, it is possible to define a destination with a mix of both types of attributes. Eight of the 33 attributes selected were negative; i.e. features that holidaymakers acknowledged they would encounter and probably detract from the overall vacation satisfaction. According to [Tribe and Snaith \(1998\)](#) although a holiday destination may have several negative attributes, holidaymakers can still display satisfaction with these if their experiences exceed their expectations. To date, no other service satisfaction model makes provision for this aspect. However, this may create a problem as not all apparently negative attributes are seen that way by all travellers. For example, [Tribe and Snaith](#) include “prostitution may be evident” as a negative attribute. It could be suggested that those going to Cuba looking for prostitutes could see this as a positive attribute; hence, their absence could result in dissatisfaction for these travellers. This is a real possibility that could skew the results. In order to acknowledge this possibility, extra care was paid to

Table 1  
Summary of results from survey questionnaires for complete sample

No.	Statement	Expectations			Experiences			(Experience– expectation) <sup>a</sup>	t-Test		
		<i>X</i>	SD	<i>n</i>	<i>X</i>	SD	<i>n</i>		<i>N</i> <sup>b</sup>	<i>t</i> <sub>obt</sub> <sup>c</sup>	SIG <sup>d</sup>
<i>Positive attributes</i>											
1	The climate would be pleasant	1.47	1.80	308	1.62	1.90	310	0.15	308	1.35	0.179
2	I would be able to see French colonial architecture	2.07	1.58	301	2.53	1.58	303	0.46	300	4.31	0.000
3	I would be able to relax on beaches	0.68	2.13	284	1.14	2.17	281	0.36	272	2.29	0.023
4	I would be able to rent a bicycle or motorcycle and go sightseeing	1.54	2.01	281	2.22	1.68	280	0.63	266	5.46	0.000
6	I would feel safe whilst travelling	1.37	1.71	306	2.05	1.93	310	0.72	306	5.65	0.000
7	I would be able to visit archeological ruins	1.33	2.06	298	1.99	1.82	297	0.65	288	4.72	0.000
9	I would be able to visit Vietnam War sites	2.53	1.29	307	2.63	1.52	308	0.10	306	1.10	0.271
11	I would be able to cruise on a river (e.g. in Hue or similar)	2.43	1.22	310	2.95	1.39	310	0.52	310	5.87	0.000
12	I would be able to visit ethnic minority people	1.78	1.74	303	2.43	1.70	299	0.61	296	5.31	0.000
13	Food and beverages would be cheap	2.97	1.12	310	3.14	1.18	310	0.17	310	1.89	0.059
14	Hotel staff would be friendly and courteous	1.92	1.41	309	2.48	1.46	310	0.56	309	5.28	0.000
15	I would be able to go trekking or backpacking	1.37	2.04	274	1.99	1.75	274	0.51	258	4.33	0.000
16	I would be able to buy cheap Vietnamese artifacts	1.55	1.56	304	2.39	1.68	296	0.82	292	6.64	0.000
17	I would be able to visit coastal regions (e.g. Ha Long Bay or similar)	2.89	1.24	309	3.13	1.19	307	0.25	306	3.21	0.001
18	Rooms would be well equipped (mini-bar, IDD telephone, air conditioning, etc.)	0.28	2.03	305	2.36	1.53	310	2.10	305	15.37	0.000
19	I would be able to visit religious sites and temples	2.40	1.25	310	2.88	1.14	310	0.48	310	5.70	0.000
20	I would be able to visit National Parks and Reserves	1.31	1.76	303	1.84	1.80	272	0.51	271	3.95	0.000
22	I would be able to witness traditional Vietnamese music and dance	1.77	1.50	307	2.34	1.65	299	0.57	297	4.75	0.000
23	I would be able to visit historical sites	2.55	1.25	310	2.83	1.12	309	0.28	309	3.69	0.000
25	Phoning home or using the Internet would be easy	-0.47	2.35	303	0.93	2.45	287	1.35	287	7.29	0.000
26	I would be able to mix and talk with Vietnamese people	1.39	2.05	310	2.42	1.69	306	0.97	306	7.16	0.000
28	I would be able to sample local food and drink	2.74	1.43	309	3.06	1.23	310	0.33	309	3.67	0.000
29	I would be able to shop in local markets	2.86	1.31	310	3.19	1.06	310	0.34	310	4.34	0.000
31	I would be able to use local transport (e.g. tri-cycle ['cyclo'])	2.42	1.23	308	2.98	1.34	306	0.58	306	6.85	0.000
32	I would be able to visit museums	2.41	1.27	310	2.97	1.09	310	0.57	310	8.26	0.000
<i>Negative attributes</i>											
5	There would be crowding at attractions	1.10	2.15	305	0.18	2.30	306	-0.96	302	6.63	0.000
8	<b>There would be many beggars and street vendors</b>	<b>2.05</b>	<b>1.60</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>2.86</b>	<b>1.52</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>0.80</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>7.21</b>	<b>0.000</b>
10	There would be a lack of public toilet facilities	1.75	1.73	306	1.52	2.39	310	-0.24	306	1.50	0.133
21	I would have difficulty obtaining cash from my credit card or ATM	1.57	1.98	301	0.88	2.40	260	-0.65	257	3.47	0.001
24	I would have to be careful about what I eat and drink	2.52	1.97	310	-0.17	2.73	309	-2.69	309	14.67	0.000
27	Changing money would be difficult	-0.02	2.26	309	-0.75	2.56	310	-0.72	309	4.30	0.000
30	<b>There would be pollution in the cities</b>	<b>2.13</b>	<b>1.62</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>2.43</b>	<b>1.77</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>2.52</b>	<b>0.012</b>
33	Immigration and Customs clearance would be slow and inefficient	1.17	1.82	309	-0.34	2.42	310	-1.51	309	10.90	0.000

Note: Statement in bold text indicates decrease in satisfaction with Attribute.

<sup>a</sup>Mean of differences.

<sup>b</sup>Number of pairs of scores.

<sup>c</sup>Non-directional (or "Two-tailed") test for paired (matched) samples for  $N > 120$ ,  $< \infty$ .

<sup>d</sup>SIG: level of significance.

those attributes which were to be expressed negatively to ensure that they reflected the views expressed in the various sources cited above (travel literature, discussions with former travellers, etc.). There appeared to be consistency of views where attributes referred to the general ambiance or context within which tourists found themselves rather than referring to a specific need being sought by an individual. Negative attributes included in the list were selected in this way.

The questionnaire was structured in three parts. Section 2 dealt with general questions seeking to establish socio-demographic characteristics of the re-

spondent. Section 3 consisted of three pages of 33 holiday attribute statements characterising Vietnam as a holiday destination: 25 positive and eight negative. This is the most important part of the survey and it is, in essence, the HOLSAT instrument. Section 4 consisted of open-ended questions enabling respondents to express more about their feelings and impressions of holidaying in Vietnam.

For the HOLSAT instrument, respondents were asked to circle the number that best described their impressions about holidaying in Vietnam. They were asked to rate their "expectation" regarding each holiday

attribute and to submit the rating of their “experience” for the same attributes using a five-point Likert scale. Because of the difficulty of maintaining contact with respondents before and after travel, the instrument was administered only once—after travel had been completed. The wording and physical placement of positive and negative Attribute statements in the instrument was varied and random. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale to rate each of the attributes from  $-4$  (“Strongly Disagree”) through to  $+4$  (“Strongly Agree”), with “0” having the meaning of “No Opinion”. A “Not Applicable” box was also offered for those travellers that felt the particular attribute was not relevant in their situation. The sequence of the attribute statements and the scoring system adopted was the same for both “expectation” and the “experience” statements to facilitate ease of use and interpretation by respondents.

#### 4.2. Pilot Survey

A Pilot Survey including an initial list of attributes was sent to 48 Australian travellers from Melbourne with past experience of holiday travel to Vietnam. These tourists were identified through colleagues, friends and travel agents. The Pilot Survey was carried out to confirm details of the questionnaire and to check the overall “workability” of the HOLSAT instrument. Identification of any deficiencies or confusing aspects, both from the respondents’ and researcher’s viewpoint prior to commencement of the formal survey was achieved. In addition to the basic questionnaire, a separate page was appended requesting additional comments concerning the “user-friendliness” of the research instrument. This task also confirmed how readily respondents understood the HOLSAT instrument. Sixteen Pilot Surveys were returned (33% return rate) and in general the feedback received was most encouraging. Following a review of the results and feedback obtained, a revised instrument was prepared. One negative attribute “Getting a Visa to travel to Vietnam would be difficult” was discarded and replaced with a different negative attribute “Changing money would be difficult”. The revised set of positive and negative attributes used in the HOLSAT instrument is shown in Table 1.

#### 4.3. Survey procedures

Collection of data was carried out using the revised HOLSAT instrument over a period of 5 months from January 2000 to March 2001 in both Australia and Vietnam. The target sample population was Australian pleasure travellers, i.e. people of any ethnic background living in Australia. The only exclusion was people of Vietnamese origin living in Australia. This decision was

made as it would be expected that Australian Vietnamese would hold views that are very different to other Australians, given past events. The sample population was drawn from Australian pleasure travellers visiting Vietnam on an organised tour or travelling as individuals. Australian visitors to Vietnam for business or other purposes were excluded as well as Australian Vietnamese visiting friends and relatives (as explained above).

Australian outbound tour operators, airline companies and Vietnamese inbound tour operators assisted in the distribution of the instrument. The principal author also personally handed out questionnaires to various Australian holidaymakers in major cities in Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang and Hanoi). Whether approached directly or through tour companies, respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire at the conclusion of their trip. It was decided to survey Australian travellers at the completion of their holiday in Australia or in Vietnam instead of surveying the same set of Australian travellers twice: initially, before they travelled to Vietnam then a second time after their vacation. It was too difficult to keep contact with the same travellers because it required a lot of cooperation and assistance from the tours operators. The approach captured a broad cross-section of Australian holidaymakers travelling to Vietnam with respondents being Australian citizens living in a wide range of locations throughout Australia.

Approximately 1200 Survey Questionnaires were distributed to Australian travellers to Vietnam and a total of 356 replies were collected. Of those returned, 46 questionnaires were incomplete and/or had an excessive amount of missing data. After elimination, 310 questionnaires were coded for data analysis. This represented a response rate of 28%, which is common for this type of survey (Veal, 1997). The returned survey instruments were checked for omissions, legibility and consistency and the data transferred and computer analysed using SPSS and Excel. In addition to the analysis of the HOLSAT results, descriptive statistical measures were used to analyse demographic characteristics and to determine the frequencies of satisfaction with Vietnamese holiday attributes.

#### 4.4. The sample

The questionnaire elicited information about the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents to indicate whether travellers to Vietnam differed from the Australian population in general. The majority of Australians who travelled to Vietnam for pleasure purposes were native-born meaning that other ethnic groups were under-represented. In terms of home location, a large proportion of respondents were from the three largest States of Australia: New South Wales

(39.0%), Victoria (32.9%) and Queensland (14.5%). Of these three States, the majority of respondents were from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. This reflects the population distribution within Australia.

The predominant age structure of the sample population is concentrated in the age group range between 45 and 64 (42.6%), which indicates that visitors tend to be older than the Australian population in general. There was higher proportion of female (61.9%) than male (38.1%) respondents and a very large percentage had higher education backgrounds (48.4% university and 19.7% postgraduate). Over 70% of them were white-collar workers, of whom 29.7% claimed to be professionals and 21% were teachers or lecturers. The respondents' occupation seemed to be consistent with their educational background and their income with 58.4% earning between \$A20,000 and \$A59,999 per annum.

Respondents had enjoyed considerable overseas travel experiences prior to their visit to Vietnam with approximately 80% having been on at least one overseas trip in the 2 years prior to their visit. However, 88.1% reported that this was their first holiday in Vietnam. It would appear that Vietnam is not a place that Australian travellers visit as regularly as Bali or New Zealand, which are considered to be the "favourite hunting grounds" of Australian holidaymakers (PATA, 1999).

The majority of respondents travelled to Vietnam on a package tour (67.7%), whilst some 29.7% said that they travelled as free and independent travellers (FITs), and 2.6% travelled on an educational tour. Given the sampling frame, it is not surprising that respondents demonstrated a strong preference for package travel. Despite this, 43.2% of respondents travelled alone while 40.9% travelled with their spouses/partners/children and 14.8% indicated travel with their friends.

Guidebooks, the Internet and travel agents were cited as being the most important means of forming Australian pleasure travellers' perceptions and expectations about Vietnam. Furthermore, word of mouth from friends or family and relatives also played a vital role in the decision-making process by providing travel information and motivating Australian visitors to choose Vietnam.

## 5. HOLSAT results

### 5.1. Results for the whole sample

The main objective of this study was to use the HOLSAT model to assess the satisfaction levels of Australian pleasure travellers to Vietnam by comparing the expectations of their destination against their actual experiences. To achieve this, the mean of the sum of

differences (between expectation and performance) was calculated for each respondent for each attribute.

Statistical analysis was performed to obtain the mean score for each of the 33 holiday attributes. The *t*-test was then used to show the degree of significance between the responses to the expectation and performance responses at the 1:1000 level. This indicated whether there is a statistically significant difference between expectation and performance scores thereby providing an evaluation of the effect of administering the instrument only once. While this is a stronger test of significance than is normally adopted in the social sciences, it was chosen to ensure consistency with the originators of the HOLSAT instrument (Tribe & Snaith, 1998). Excel spreadsheets were used to develop the plots of both positive and negative attributes scores on separate matrices, with "expectation" scores (*Y*-axis) plotted against "experience" scores (*X*-axis). "Win" or "Loss" segments were developed on each matrix, with the 45° diagonal line representing the "Draw" line. This allowed a visual representation of positive and negative matrices as indicated in Figs. 1 and 2. The further away an attribute point is plotted from the "Draw" line, the greater the gain or loss of satisfaction observed for that particular attribute.

Table 1 is a summary of results obtained from analysis of questionnaires returned by Australian holidaymakers to Vietnam, which details the following information:

- (i) A listing of the Vietnam holiday attributes contained in the questionnaire, grouped under the headings of positive and negative attributes.
- (ii) Mean score (*X*) and standard deviation (SD) for each attribute statement for both "expectation" and "experience" conditions.
- (iii) Number of responses for each statement (*n*).
- (iv) Numerical value of the difference between "experience" and "expectation" scores computed for each attribute for each respondent (Mean of Differences).

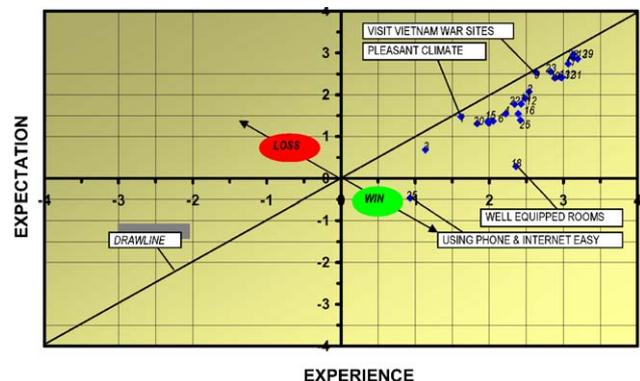


Fig. 1. Expectation/experience matrix for positive attributes.

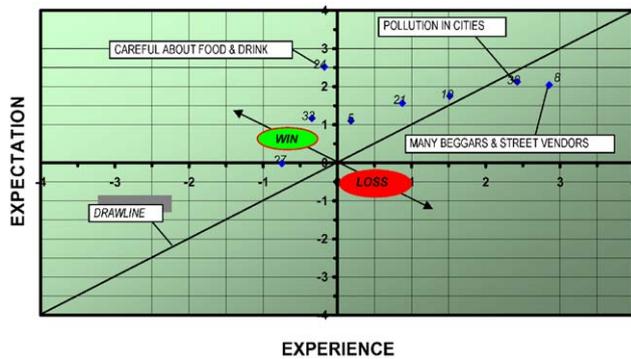


Fig. 2. Expectation/experience matrix for negative attributes.

(v) *t*-Test results: Number of paired of scores ( $N$ ), value computed ( $t_{\text{obt}}$ ), critical value for non-directional (“two-tailed”) test for matched (paired) samples ( $t_{\text{crit}}$ ) and the significance at the 1:1000 level.

### 5.2. Positive attributes

The results of the *t*-test presented in Table 1 show that for 21 out of the 25 Positive attributes the difference between “experience” and “expectation” is significant at the 1:1000 level. As noted, there are four Positive attributes that do not show statistically significant results (attributes 3, 13, 1, 9). While it cannot be established that the differences between “expectation” and “experience” in these four results are not due to chance, the data obtained for these attributes demonstrate a positive response from those interviewed. All of these four attributes appear just below the “Draw” line since the two scores are similar, suggesting that satisfaction has barely been achieved. By contrast, attribute number 18, 32, 25, 26, 31, 16 showing significant levels of satisfaction (where  $t_{\text{obt}}$  is  $>6$ ) are located well away from the “Draw” line.

### 5.3. Negative attributes

According to Tribe and Snaith (1998), a negative difference between “experience” and “expectation” for the negative attributes indicates satisfaction. This means that the attribute was not as bad as initially thought, therefore, the performance of these six negative attributes scored better than expected.

Based on the *t*-test results at the 1:1000 level, respondents’ rating of six out of the eight negative attributes are significantly different. Included in this group, attribute number [8] (“There would be many beggars and street vendors”) obtained a *t*-test result of  $t_{\text{obt}} = 7.21$ . However, as this attribute shows a positive difference, it indicates a significant *loss* of satisfaction. Three negative attributes (attributes number [24], [33] and [5]) show a gain of satisfaction based on the Mean

of Differences and obtain the *t*-test with  $t_{\text{obt}} > 6$  at the 1:1000 level.

Since the differences between “experience” and “expectation” for negative attributes numbers [8] and number [30] are positive, the performance has failed to meet the Australian travellers’ expectations, resulting in an apparent loss of satisfaction and subsequently lie in the “Loss” area of the HOLSAT Matrix (Fig. 2). However, while attribute number [8] (“There would be many beggars and street vendors”) showed significance from the *t*-test at the 1:1000 level, attribute number [30] (“There would be pollution in the cities”) did not (see Table 1).

Fig. 2 is a HOLSAT Matrix for Negative attributes with “expectation” scores plotted against “experience”. Numbered data points correspond to attribute numbers from Table 1. The two attributes that lie in the “Loss” area of the Matrix are labelled. Attribute number [24] (“I would have to be careful about what I eat and drink”) is also labelled in Fig. 2, and is furthest away from the “Draw” line. This indicates that respondents had highest levels of satisfaction with this negative attribute, suggesting that holidaymakers in practice found they did not have to pay as much concern to what they ate and drank as they had expected.

### 5.4. Results of HOLSAT applied to market segments

The usefulness of the HOLSAT model was tested by examining various sample segments, something that was not undertaken by Tribe and Snaith (1998) as part of their original research. While several segments were analysed, what is reported here is the use of the model to investigate differences in satisfaction between those travelling on a package tour and those travelling as FITs.

Included in the total sample was a very small number of respondents (eight in total), who said that they were on an ‘educational tour’. An analysis of these as a separate group would be meaningless. As all those in this group travelled independently and engaged in a range of leisure activities (with the ‘educational’ component being to undertake a short language program), the characteristics of their trips were very similar to those describing themselves as FIT. They were therefore included in the FIT group.<sup>1</sup>

### 5.5. Holiday package tour group

#### 5.5.1. Positive attributes for package tour group

Based on the application of *t*-test to verify the statistical validity of the difference between the scores,

<sup>1</sup>Subsequent analysis of the FIT group without the inclusion of the eight respondents who described their trip as an ‘educational tour’ indicated that there was very little difference in the results obtained.

only 14 attributes have significant scores (of experience minus expectation) at the level 1:1000. These are highlighted in Table 2 where the *t*-test values are also shown. The other 11 attributes do not show a significant difference.

### 5.5.2. Negative attributes for package tour group

The results from the *t*-test application shows the difference for five out of the eight negative attributes is significant at the 1:1000 level as indicated in Table 2. Three of the five negative attributes showed a very high level of satisfaction with  $t_{obt} > 6$ : attributes number [24],

[33] and [8]. While negative attribute number [8] showed significance at the 1:1000 level, it obtains a positive value in the mean of difference, therefore indicating a loss of satisfaction. Table 2 summarises the results obtained for positive and negative attribute statements for the package tour group.

### 5.6. Free and independent travellers

#### 5.6.1. Positive attributes for FIT group

When the *t*-test is applied to verify the statistical validity of the difference between the scores, 13

Table 2  
Segmentation analysis for holiday package tour group

No.	Statement	Expectations			Experiences			(Experience– expectation) <sup>a</sup>	t-Test		
		<i>X</i>	SD	<i>n</i>	<i>X</i>	SD	<i>n</i>		<i>N</i> <sup>b</sup>	<i>t</i> <sub>obt</sub> <sup>c</sup>	SIG <sup>d</sup>
<i>Positive attributes</i>											
1	The climate would be pleasant	1.49	1.83	209	1.61	2.05	210	0.11	209	0.75	0.457
2	I would be able to see French colonial architecture	2.21	1.54	204	2.55	1.59	205	0.34	203	2.79	0.006
3	I would be able to relax on beaches	0.60	2.18	189	0.86	2.28	189	0.19	183	0.89	0.374
4	I would be able to rent a bicycle or motorcycle and go sightseeing	1.42	2.00	185	2.23	1.59	183	0.77	172	5.26	0.000
6	I would feel safe whilst travelling	1.35	1.76	206	2.28	1.74	210	0.99	206	6.78	0.000
7	I would be able to visit archeological ruins	1.54	2.04	202	1.89	1.93	202	0.38	196	2.19	0.030
9	I would be able to visit Vietnam War sites	2.46	1.34	207	2.59	1.57	208	0.12	206	1.11	0.270
11	I would be able to cruise on a river (e.g. in Hue or similar)	2.55	1.16	210	2.92	1.47	210	0.37	210	3.56	0.000
12	I would be able to visit ethnic minority people	1.79	1.81	205	2.26	1.82	202	0.45	201	3.08	0.002
13	Food and beverages would be cheap	2.99	1.14	210	3.19	1.23	210	0.20	210	1.91	0.058
14	Hotel staff would be friendly and courteous	1.93	1.43	210	2.52	1.51	210	0.59	210	4.51	0.000
15	I would be able to go trekking or backpacking	1.34	2.11	183	2.00	1.73	183	0.51	171	3.40	0.001
16	I would be able to buy cheap Vietnamese artifacts	1.61	1.59	207	2.34	1.73	198	0.69	197	4.61	0.000
17	I would be able to visit coastal regions (e.g. Ha Long Bay or similar)	2.98	1.19	210	3.18	1.18	207	0.20	207	2.49	0.014
18	Rooms would be well equipped (mini-bar, IDD telephone, air conditioning, etc.)	0.45	2.08	209	2.39	1.58	210	1.94	209	11.62	0.000
19	I would be able to visit religious sites and temples	2.47	1.19	210	2.86	1.20	210	0.39	210	4.07	0.000
20	I would be able to visit National Parks and Reserves	1.11	1.85	203	1.79	1.76	180	0.66	179	4.34	0.000
22	I would be able to witness traditional Vietnamese music and dance	1.96	1.36	208	2.23	1.74	202	0.25	200	1.82	0.070
23	I would be able to visit historical sites	2.69	1.22	210	2.84	1.18	209	0.16	209	1.90	0.059
25	Phoning home or using the Internet would be easy	−0.25	2.44	204	0.86	2.57	192	1.05	192	4.53	0.000
26	I would be able to mix and talk with Vietnamese people	1.36	2.17	210	2.50	1.66	206	1.06	206	6.24	0.000
28	I would be able to sample local food and drink	2.70	1.45	210	3.01	1.30	210	0.31	210	2.73	0.007
29	I would be able to shop in local markets	2.85	1.36	210	3.25	1.03	210	0.40	210	4.29	0.000
31	I would be able to use local transport (e.g. tri-cycle ['cyclo'])	2.44	1.26	208	2.91	1.47	206	0.49	206	4.48	0.000
32	I would be able to visit museums	2.50	1.26	210	3.02	1.06	210	0.52	210	6.83	0.000
<i>Negative attributes</i>											
5	There would be crowding at attractions	1.32	2.20	206	0.18	2.36	206	−1.20	203	7.04	0.000
8	<b>There would be many beggars and street vendors</b>	<b>2.11</b>	<b>1.62</b>	208	<b>2.78</b>	<b>1.64</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>0.66</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>4.75</b>	<b>0.000</b>
10	There would be a lack of public toilet facilities	1.69	1.75	208	1.54	2.32	210	−0.17	208	0.95	0.345
21	I would have difficulty obtaining cash from my credit card or ATM	1.72	1.98	204	0.92	2.45	169	−0.78	169	3.47	0.001
24	I would have to be careful about what I eat and drink	2.47	2.10	210	−0.12	2.68	209	−2.58	209	11.89	0.000
27	Changing money would be difficult	−0.07	2.38	210	−0.77	2.65	210	−0.70	210	3.28	0.001
30	<b>There would be pollution in the cities</b>	<b>2.25</b>	<b>1.63</b>	210	<b>2.36</b>	<b>1.85</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>0.85</b>	<b>0.395</b>
33	Immigration and Customs clearance would be slow and inefficient	1.07	1.86	210	−0.26	2.48	210	−1.32	210	8.24	0.000

Note: Statement in bold text indicates decrease in satisfaction with Attribute.

<sup>a</sup>Mean of differences.

<sup>b</sup>Number of pairs of scores.

<sup>c</sup>Non-directional (or “Two-tailed”) test for paired (matched) samples for  $N > 120$ ,  $< \infty$ .

<sup>d</sup>SIG: level of significance.

attributes have significant scores (of experience–expectation). Table 3 indicated the results from the *t*-test analysis.

### 5.6.2. Negative attributes for FIT group

Based on the application of the *t*-test at the 1:1000 level, the FIT group rated three of the eight negative attributes high in significance with  $t_{\text{obt}} > 6$ : attributes number [24], [3] and [8]. However, attribute number [8] indicates a loss of satisfaction as it shows a positive mean of differences.

### 5.6.3. Common significant attributes for package tour and FITs

Respondents from both groups were satisfied with eight out of the 25 positive attributes. However, the FITs rated seven out of these eight attributes higher than their package tour counterparts on the basis of the mean of differences. The exception is attribute number [26] “I would be able to mix and talk with Vietnamese people” (see Table 4).

Regarding common negative attributes, both package tour and FITs were very satisfied with the attributes number [24] and [33] and were dissatisfied with attribute

Table 3  
Segmentation analysis for free and independent travelers group

No.	Statement	Expectations			Experiences			(Experience– expectation) <sup>a</sup>	<i>t</i> -Test		
		<i>X</i>	SD	<i>n</i>	<i>X</i>	SD	<i>n</i>		<i>N</i> <sup>b</sup>	$t_{\text{obt}}$ <sup>c</sup>	SIG <sup>d</sup>
<i>Positive attributes</i>											
1	The climate would be pleasant	1.43	1.74	99	1.64	1.57	100	0.24	99	1.38	0.170
2	I would be able to see French colonial architecture	1.79	1.62	97	2.51	1.58	98	0.70	97	3.45	0.001
3	I would be able to relax on beaches	0.84	2.01	95	1.72	1.82	92	0.72	89	3.34	0.001
4	I would be able to rent a bicycle or motorcycle and go sightseeing	1.79	2.00	96	2.21	1.86	97	0.38	94	2.05	0.044
6	I would feel safe whilst travelling	1.42	1.59	100	1.58	2.21	100	0.16	100	0.67	0.505
7	I would be able to visit archeological ruins	0.88	2.05	96	2.19	1.55	95	1.22	92	5.81	0.000
9	I would be able to visit Vietnam War sites	2.66	1.17	100	2.72	1.41	100	0.06	100	0.36	0.716
11	I would be able to cruise on a river (e.g. in Hue or similar)	2.18	1.31	100	3.02	1.22	100	0.84	100	5.13	0.000
12	I would be able to visit ethnic minority people	1.78	1.60	98	2.78	1.34	97	0.97	95	5.26	0.000
13	Food and beverages would be cheap	2.92	1.08	100	3.02	1.08	100	0.10	100	0.61	0.544
14	Hotel staff would be friendly and courteous	1.88	1.36	99	2.40	1.36	100	0.51	99	2.74	0.007
15	I would be able to go trekking or backpacking	1.43	1.89	91	1.96	1.81	91	0.51	87	2.72	0.008
16	I would be able to buy cheap Vietnamese artifacts	1.40	1.48	97	2.49	1.57	98	1.07	95	5.03	0.000
17	I would be able to visit coastal regions (e.g. Ha Long Bay or similar)	2.69	1.31	99	3.02	1.19	100	0.34	99	2.05	0.043
18	Rooms would be well equipped (mini-bar, IDD telephone, air conditioning, etc.)	−0.08	1.88	96	2.30	1.43	100	2.44	96	10.43	0.000
19	I would be able to visit religious sites and temples	2.26	1.38	100	2.94	1.00	100	0.68	100	4.03	0.000
20	I would be able to visit National Parks and Reserves	1.70	1.51	100	1.93	1.89	92	0.22	92	0.92	0.360
22	I would be able to witness traditional Vietnamese music and dance	1.37	1.71	99	2.58	1.41	97	1.24	97	5.57	0.000
23	I would be able to visit historical sites	2.28	1.27	100	2.80	0.98	100	0.52	100	3.55	0.001
25	Phoning home or using the Internet would be easy	−0.93	2.11	99	1.07	2.18	95	1.96	95	6.58	0.000
26	I would be able to mix and talk with Vietnamese people	1.46	1.77	100	2.24	1.76	100	0.78	100	3.52	0.001
28	I would be able to sample local food and drink	2.83	1.40	99	3.18	1.07	100	0.36	99	2.62	0.010
29	I would be able to shop in local markets	2.88	1.18	100	3.08	1.12	100	0.20	100	1.45	0.150
31	I would be able to use local transport (e.g. tri-cycle [‘cyclo’])	2.36	1.19	100	3.12	1.00	100	0.76	100	6.01	0.000
32	I would be able to visit museums	2.22	1.27	100	2.88	1.15	100	0.66	100	4.73	0.000
<i>Negative attributes</i>											
5	There would be crowding at attractions	0.65	1.98	99	0.18	2.19	100	−0.46	99	1.76	0.082
8	<b>There would be many beggars and street vendors</b>	<b>1.92</b>	<b>1.55</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>3.02</b>	<b>1.22</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1.09</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>6.21</b>	<b>0.000</b>
10	There would be a lack of public toilet facilities	1.88	1.67	98	1.46	2.54	100	−0.39	98	1.22	0.227
21	I would have difficulty obtaining cash from my credit card or ATM	1.26	1.96	97	0.79	2.31	91	−0.41	88	1.21	0.231
24	I would have to be careful about what I eat and drink	2.64	1.68	100	−0.28	2.83	100	−2.92	100	8.58	0.000
27	Changing money would be difficult	0.08	2.02	99	−0.70	2.38	100	−0.77	99	2.92	0.004
30	<b>There would be pollution in the cities</b>	<b>1.88</b>	<b>1.57</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>2.56</b>	<b>1.58</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>3.05</b>	<b>0.003</b>
33	Immigration and Customs clearance would be slow and inefficient	1.39	1.73	99	−0.52	2.29	100	−1.90	99	7.24	0.000

Note: Statement in bold text indicates decrease in satisfaction with Attribute.

<sup>a</sup>Mean of differences.

<sup>b</sup>Number of pairs of scores.

<sup>c</sup>Non-directional (or “Two-tailed”) test for paired (Matched) samples for  $N > 60$ ,  $< 120$ .

<sup>d</sup>SIG: level of significance.

number [8] based on the Mean of Difference. The FIT group, however, rated these three attributes higher than their package tour counterparts as listed in Table 5.

An interpretation of this data is that both groups were very satisfied with the accommodation and telecommunication services in Vietnam, with the cruising on the river, using “Cyclo” as a local transport, buying Vietnamese artefacts and visiting religious sites and museums and mixing and talking with Vietnamese people. However, the FIT group was more satisfied than the package tour group with all seven attributes referred to in the previous paragraph except for the attribute “talking to local people”. With reference to this attribute, both groups had similar expectations (1.36 for tour groups and 1.46 for FITs) but the experiences of the FIT group fell below that of the tour group respondents (2.24 cf. 2.50). The friendliness and hospitality of Vietnamese people is often promoted by destination marketers as being one of the strengths of Vietnam holiday offering. It appears that tour operators are able to deliver this to a greater degree than is available to independent travellers.

Besides these common positive attributes mentioned above, both groups have different satisfaction levels with regard to their holiday in Vietnam. The package tour respondents were more satisfied with certain holiday activities such as shopping in the local markets [29], renting a bicycle or motorcycle for sightseeing [4], visiting National Parks and Reserves [20] and trekking or backpacking [15] than the FITs. In comparison with their FIT counterparts, they felt safer whilst travelling in Vietnam [6] and were pleased with the attitude of hotel

staff [14]. It is important for the Tour Operators to understand the likes and dislikes of this group, as the package tour is a very popular mode of travel for Australian holidaymakers to Vietnam. More attention needs to be paid to certain attributes as mentioned above. The FITs were more satisfied than their counterparts in several holiday attributes. With a possibly longer stay and more flexible itinerary, they were able to relax on beaches [3] and were also more interested in activities which focused on art and culture. They enjoyed witnessing traditional Vietnamese music and dance [22], visiting archaeological ruins [7], historical sites [23], French colonial architecture [2] as well as ethnic minority people [12].

Regarding negative attributes, both groups were pleased with the immigration and customs services [33] and were less concerned that expected about what they ate and drank in Vietnam [24]. However, both groups were very dissatisfied with the harassment from beggars and street vendors [8].

One interesting observation that was made during the analysis was that the variation in satisfaction (as measured by the difference between expectation and experience) appeared to be mainly driven by expectations. While not the primary focus of the research, a brief analysis was undertaken to test the validity of this observation. A *t*-test was performed to find out if there was any significant difference between the expectation scores for each attribute for the two groups (tour group and FIT group). It was discovered that for nine out of the 33 attributes there was a significant difference at the 0.05 level. These tended to be attributes that would

Table 4  
Common significant positive attributes of package and FIT groups

No.	Positive attributes	Mean of differences package tour	Mean of differences FITs
18	Rooms would be well equipped	1.94	2.44
25	Phoning home or using the Internet would be easy	1.05	1.96
16	I would be able to buy cheap Vietnamese artifacts	0.69	1.07
31	I would be able to use local transport	0.49	0.76
32	I would be able to visit museums	0.52	0.66
11	I would be able to cruise on a river	0.37	0.84
19	I would be able to visit religious sites and temples	0.39	0.68
26	I would be able to mix and talk with Vietnamese people	1.06	0.78

Table 5  
Common significant negative attributes of package and FIT groups

No.	Negative attributes	Mean of difference package tour	Mean of difference FITs
24	I would have to be careful about what I eat and drink	-2.58	-2.92
33	Immigration and Customs clearance would be slow and inefficient	-1.32	-1.90
8	There would be many beggars and street vendors	0.66	1.09

normally be associated with group travel (“I would be able to see French Colonial Architecture”, “I would be able to visit Archaeological Ruins”, “Rooms would be well equipped”, etc.). For each attribute but one (Attribute 20: “I would be able to visit National Parks and Reserves”), the scores for the tour group were higher than for the FITs. When the same analysis was undertaken for Experience scores, only three attributes were found to be significantly different between the two groups. Moreover, when the details behind the common positive attributes were reviewed (Table 4), it was found that where the Mean of Difference is high, the corresponding group has lower expectations. For example, for Attribute 18 the Mean of Difference score for FITs is 2.44 compared with 1.94 for the package tour group. Here, the expectations on this attribute for the package tour group were higher resulting in a lower Mean of Difference. Where the opposite is the case (i.e. Attribute 26 where the Mean of Difference score is higher for the package tour group) the expectations of that group are lower. It therefore appears that the model may be at least partially driven by expectations rather than experience. This needs further investigation before a definitive statement can be made.

## 6. Implications of the research

### 6.1. Theoretical implications

The HOLSAT model has proven to be a very valuable tool for analysing the satisfaction levels of Australian holidaymakers visiting Vietnam. However, it is not without its problems. This section provides some reflections on its use in this case in order to outline some of its strengths and weakness.

HOLSAT does provide a valuable diagnostic tool that visually displays the results for easy interpretation. Ryan (1999, p. 282) has suggested that giving “management a simple tool that produces results whereby they can tackle areas of weakness in their company’s service delivery” is one of the strengths of SERVQUAL. This may turn out to be the enduring strength of HOLSAT. To make this diagnostic role easier, it may be appropriate to include both negative and positive attributes on one matrix rather than two. This could be done through data manipulation (i.e. data recoding) after the data is collected. It would not be appropriate to do it in the questionnaire as this may cause confusion and could remove the value of having positive and negative attributes.

With very little effort the model can be run for different segments of the market. This makes the model much more diagnostic and thereby of greater value to industry. For instance, the HOLSAT model applied to the mode of travel used by Australian pleasure travellers

when holidaying in Vietnam has indicated the differences in their perception as well as their satisfaction. Compared with the total sample, the package tour and the FITs have wide differences in the mean rating of experience minus expectation and show different levels of satisfaction.

Tribe and Snaith (1998) made four observations regarding the limitations of their original study. These were deliberately addressed in the current study and the results are as follows:

Firstly, Tribe and Snaith (1998) suggested that the limited knowledge regarding the parameters of the sampling frame created problems. Unfortunately, it is not possible to overcome this problem, as detailed descriptive data concerning the characteristics of visitors to Vietnam is not available. However, by limiting the target population down to a specific market segment (in this case Australian pleasure travellers) the effect of this is reduced.

Secondly, Tribe and Snaith (1998) suggested that future studies should use a tripartite approach for the development of the sample by contacting respondents at the start of their trip (expectations), during their stay (performance measure 1) and after their return (performance measure 2). Given the difficulties faced by the principal author in obtaining the cooperation of travellers this suggestion, while desirable, would be difficult to implement. The use of the *t*-test indicates that respondents are able to distinguish between their expectations of particular attributes and their perceptions of their experiences. It, therefore, does not appear necessary to undertake the difficult task of interviewing before, during and after the respondent’s visit unless the specific interest is in the way that satisfaction changes over time.

Thirdly, Tribe and Snaith (1998) suggested that their instrument was too long leaving insufficient time to capture the richness of additional data from respondents. The current study addressed this issue by reducing the number of attributes included in the instrument and adding a number of open-ended questions. While the latter have not been reported here, they did prove to be extremely valuable in understanding the nuances surrounding travellers’ satisfaction with their experiences in Vietnam. It also demonstrated the validity of the results obtained via the model by comparing them with the data obtained through the open-ended questions. The inclusion of the open-ended questions also demonstrated that the respondents were comparing what they experienced with what they expected. They were not using a conceptual framework based on a holiday ideal (as in models based on SERVQUAL). This provides good support for the approach adopted in HOLSAT. However, while the use of open-ended questions does provide rich data regarding the views of respondents, collection and

analysis is much more difficult than the quantitative approach at the heart of HOLSAT. Moreover, the methodology behind the HOLSAT model is transparent and easy to follow. This makes the results more acceptable to decision-makers.

Finally, Tribe and Snaith (1998) suggested that they did not include sufficient questions to give respondents the opportunity to summarise their overall experience. In the current study, this was done with the measures being whether the respondent would recommend to others Vietnam as a destination and whether they would return. With regard to the former measure, the vast majority of respondents (96.8%) said “Yes” with only 3.2% of respondents replying in the negative. It should be noted that the 10 respondents who were dissatisfied with their holidays in Vietnam are the same persons who stated that their holiday was not good value for money and who will not revisit and recommend Vietnam to others. In response to the question of repeating their visit to Vietnam, of the 310 visitors surveyed, 229 (73.9%) stated that they would consider coming back to Vietnam again, whilst 81 (26.1%) indicated the contrary. Out of 81 respondents who indicated that they had no intention of visiting Vietnam again, 71 stated that one visit was enough as they wished to travel to other countries. The remainder 10 respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their trips to Vietnam because of some negative experience encountered whilst holidaying in the country. The addition of these questions has shown that satisfaction (or lack thereof) is only partly related to the decision people make regarding returning to a destination. Many satisfied travellers indicated that they felt that one visit was enough.

The HOLSAT model therefore appears to have potential for the analysis of satisfaction of particular market groups in specific destinations, especially as a diagnostic tool to identify which attributes of the destination have contributed to satisfaction. However, like any model, it does have its problems.

The reality is that the model only really adds a graphical dimension to a basic disconfirmation model. While this graphical dimension makes it somewhat easier to interpret, it does not add anything to the basic characteristics of the disconfirmation approach itself. It does not help us to understand exactly what the gap is actually measuring. Research by Brown et al. (1992, p. 138) found that “the perception scores component by itself performed as well as the difference scores on a number of criteria”. The analysis of the difference between the views of tour group and FIT respondents above indicated that many of the differences were driven by variations in preferences rather than difference scores.

Likewise, HOLSAT does not really address the issue of importance in the disconfirmation model. While the

model identifies which aspect of their overall trip respondents are most satisfied with, it does not tell us how important those attributes are to the respondent’s overall satisfaction. Whilst all may contribute, some are likely to have a more significant role than others in the final assessment of satisfaction and the recommendation of the destination to others. This leads to an even more significant criticism—one that can be levelled at many disconfirmation models—that HOLSAT does not acknowledge the reiterative and higher order nature of satisfaction. Ryan (1999) has raised the question of whether a holiday is experienced and assessed as a holistic experience or a sequence of experiences? Moreover, given the involvement of the individual in creating the holiday experience, including “issues of status and ego involvement” (Ryan, 1999, p. 281), many of the key distinguishing differences between the holiday experience and other forms of services consumption are not addressed by HOLSAT.

## 6.2. Marketing implications

In this study, the measurement of Australian pleasure travellers’ satisfaction is seen from the results of a comparative process between experiences of holiday attributes in Vietnam compared with the expectations of those attributes. The findings reveal that respondents have rated 21 out of the 25 Positive attributes high in significance *t*-test, whereas four attributes do not show such significance. These 21 attributes are the strength of the tourism industry in Vietnam. The Vietnam tourism authorities should maintain and enhance the quality of these attributes to satisfy the requirements of the potential tourists. Furthermore, the Australian Outbound Tour Operators should also promote these attributes and continue to include them on the Australian itineraries. On the other hand, the application of the HOLSAT model to the mode of travel used by respondents indicated different preferences between the two groups: package tour and free independent travellers groups. These findings have important implications for segmentation marketing and could also be utilised for tour planning and product development for Australian as well as Vietnamese Tour Operators. This may be particularly valuable if the suggestion that satisfaction may be driven by expectations rather than experiences is shown to be true in subsequent research.

These findings are also consistent with the outcomes from the open questions. Regarding positive aspects of Vietnam as a holiday destination, the findings reveal that respondents showed strong interest in Vietnamese culture and history, which is consistent with the benefits sought such as different cultures and famous attractions in a foreign destination.

## 7. Conclusion

This is only the second use of the HOLSAT model that the authors are aware of. It would appear from these two applications that it has the potential to become a useful diagnostic tool for measuring visitor satisfaction with destinations. However, it would be valuable to see further development of the model, preferably making use of some of the suggestions made above, in order to increase confidence in its validity and use.

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